PROGRESS REPORT PHASE ONE

An Exploratory Study of the Experiences of LGBT+ Veterans Affected by 'the Ban'

July 2022

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In the recent history of the United Kingdom no group of Armed Forces Veterans have faced such wilful neglect and intended exclusion. For decades, these men and women, faced the challenges of service life, and so many other challenges placed in their path. In their lives beyond service, they have faced alone the rigours forced upon them by the 'ban' and the demons of their past.

In 2018, equipped with little more than the values they learned in their service lives, Fighting With Pride, began its journey to light a champions torch for our LGBT+ veterans, forming as a charity in January 2020. They have passed that torch every day to new organisations in the military family and enlightenment burns ever more brightly. With great care and with the support of the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust and NHS England, the FWP Northumbria research team have shone light into the darkest corners of the lives of those most affected by the 'ban'. Our aim has been to find out how, in their isolation they have fared, so that we can shape support services for the future which will begin the journey back to the protections of the Armed Forces Covenant. If they wish, we hope many will find the strength and confidence to re-join the military family from which they were forcibly removed, so that together we can bring to an end some of the enduring cruelty of the years of the 'ban'.

FWPs work with the Northern Hub for Veterans and Military Families' Research is unique in the depth of its connection to FWPs 'lived experience' team. Enabled by FWPs Veterans Community Workers, the Northern Hub has connected to hundreds of LGBT+ veterans, serving personnel and families, supporting them to find their voices. This team will deliver unique research with a tight focus upon outcomes that can quickly deliver enduring change for veterans and also the families of those we have lost. The 'Tackling Loneliness' research team offers the promise of absolute clarity upon what has happened, the impact and the way forward.

Simple things like understanding language, why the word 'queer' is a trigger to the older generation we support, and a barrier in reaching out. In their lifetime it was used as a derogatory term originating in hate speech and even today can trigger memories of ill treatment, bullying and worse. Younger generations embrace it as a self-descriptor, commonly using LGBTQ+, but at FWP we respectfully use LGBT+. Why is T (trans) included in the 'gay ban'? Understanding the lack of LGBT+ awareness of the time, the willingness to judge difference through the same lens of prejudice, not understanding the difference between sexual orientation and gender identity, as we do today, these are some of the answers.

Understanding language itself is an important part of understanding the history. If we don't hear their stories, if we don't understand this part of history, how can we ever hope to enhance the health and well-being of a community that needs support more than ever.

This is a journey which step by step, will bring transformational change to the veteran sector, not simply for LGBT+ veterans, but will also blaze a trail for women and ethnic minorities. Amidst a rapidly changing demographic, everybody must be welcome.

Beneath FWP's rainbows and an annual sprinkle of glitter in Pride Month, their veterans wear the medals of over 60 years of armed conflict and contingency. They are our brightest and best and they reflect our shared pride in the UK's values today. LGBT+ veterans talk of squadrons, ships and regiments, arduous appointments, of friendships made and those they have lost. They love their service like all other veterans and are rightly proud of todays Armed Forces and, given their past, their pride in our Armed Forces is remarkable in itself.

When this work is done, FWP and the Northern Hub for Veterans and Military Families' Research hope that many more of our veterans will be proud of their service. We also hope that the organisations that have a duty to support them will redouble their endeavours and no longer feel their shame of the decades of neglect.

This journey has only just begun, but we get better with every step.

Craig Jones MBE & Caroline Paige
Fighting With Pride Joint CEOs

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Acknowledgments

We would sincerely like to thank all those who participated in this study. This project could not have happened without the support of the participants who gave their time and, thankfully, told us their stories. We would like to extend our appreciation and thanks to the peer-researchers Dave Small and Sally McGlone.

This project was funded by The Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust through their Tackling Loneliness programme, which aims to address social isolation by targeting specific groups within the Armed Forces community who are traditionally harder to reach. We would like to say thank you to the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust for making this research possible and for all their continued support.

Project Team

Fighting With Pride

Formed in 2020, Fighting With Pride (FWP) is the only national organisation that offers peer-led support to connect the LGBT+ veterans' community. By creating mutually supportive networks to improve health and well-being, FWP is reducing enduring and debilitating isolation and loneliness within the LGBT+ Veterans community. The FWP team includes pivotal leaders and protagonists of change, including the founders and Chairs of groups that successfully challenged the ban in the courts, leaders of change that transformed the Armed Forces' approach to LGBT+ and currently serving leaders of the Armed Forces employee network groups.

Northern Hub for Veterans and Military Families Research

The Northern Hub for Veterans and Military Families Research was established in 2014 and sits within Northumbria University, Newcastle. It is a collective of academics, service providers and service users with an interest in improving the health and social well-being of Armed Forces veterans and their families.

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1. Introduction

1.1. Background

The Armed Forces in the UK implemented a policy of discharging all known gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender personnel up until January 12, 2000. Known as the 'gay ban', this policy included all LGBT+ personnel with no distinction between sexual orientation and gender identity (Paige, Dodds, & Jones, 2021)[1]. It was claimed that the reason for the ban was that homosexuality was incompatible with military service and that homosexual behaviour could cause offence, induce ill-discipline, and compromise security (Dean Sinclair, 2009)[2].

Following years of resistance by the Armed Forces and a ruling by the European Court of Human Rights the policy was ended (Belkin, & Evans, 2000)[3]. However, this was not before a significant number of LGBT+ personnel were dismissed from the UK Armed Forces 'In Disgrace' or 'Services No-longer Required'. Prior to dismissal they were commonly arrested, investigated, subjected to court martial/summary trial, and placed in military detention. Some were forcibly outed to family and friends. All lost their jobs, many lost their families, children and homes and were scattered across the UK. Many of those dismissed endured financial hardship and faced their new lives alone amidst feelings of shame and anger.

Little is known of the LGBT+ veterans' community. It is believed by those closest to this community that many may live in poverty, poor health and have endured trauma. However, there is no academic evidence base to support this hypothesis. Outreach, community building, and research of support needs were not attempted during the years of the ban or since.

Through the work of FWP and other service charities, awareness of the need for outreach is increasing. But, because so little is known of this community, there is a risk of well-meaning initiatives being based upon assumptions not informed by strategy or supported by expert practitioners with lived experience and support needs. Therefore, there is an urgent need to make sure that health and welfare needs are identified, and effective support services developed. Connections between LGBT+ veteran community members are fragmented. Because little is known of the needs of this community or the extent to which needs are met, navigation between pathways to access support will also be considered.

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[1] Paige, C., Dodds, C., & Jones, C. (2021). Mental health and well-being of LGBT+ Veterans dismissed from the British Armed Forces before January 2000. *Journal of Military, Veteran and Family Health*, *7*(S1), 122-126.

[2] Dean Sinclair, G. (2009). Homosexuality and the military: A review of the literature. *Journal of Homosexuality*, *56*(6), 701-718.

[3] Belkin, A., & Evans, R. (2000). The Effects of Including Gay and Lesbian Soldiers in the British Armed Forces: Appraising the Evidence. *UC Santa Barbara: Center for the Study of Sexual Minorities in the Military*. Retrieved from https://escholarship.org/uc/item/433055x9

1.2. Systematic Narrative Literature Review

A systematic narrative literature review has been carried out to investigate the status of research in the area and identify gaps in the evidence base to inform development of the qualitative interview schedule for Phase One of the study. The narrative review of the literature explored the impact of serving in the Armed Forces under the ban on LGBT+ personnel. The review included articles that explored pre-enlistment factors, military service under the ban – including a culture of oppression, homosexuality investigations, coping strategies, emotional health and well-being, and career repercussions – military service after the ban repeal and transitional difficulties post military life.

Specifically, the review looked to uncover literature surrounding the impact of the UK Armed Forces LGBT+ ban on the LGBT+ Veteran community including experiences of social isolation and loneliness. The full findings of this systematic narrative literature review will be reported and discussed in the final research project report.

1.3. LGBT Veterans Independent Review

On 22 June 2022 (over a year after this research project began), the Government announced that the Rt Hon. The Lord Etherton has been appointed as chair of the review examining the experiences of LGBT veterans affected by the pre-2000 ban on homosexuality in the Armed Forces. The Government accepts that the ban was wrong and there is now a Call for Evidence on how LGBT personnel were treated during military service and the long-term impact on individuals and those around them. Note: the government uses the term LGBT, not LGBT+.

2. Project Method

2.1. Project Aim

The project aim is to examine the personal impact of the ban upon LGBT+ Veterans.

2.2. Project Design

To fully understand the impact of the ban on LGBT+ Veterans, a mixed methods approach will be used over two phases (see Figure 1). Phase One consisted of a qualitative exploratory study involving semi-structured interviews with a stratified sample of veterans. This phase in the study examined the personal impact of the LGBT+ ban by facilitating individual participants to tell their story and talk about their experiences. Phase Two will be informed by the data collection from the first phase of the study to develop a survey for distribution to the wider LGBT+ veterans' community - the quantitative element. Results from Phases One and Two will be combined to triangulate findings and enhance the analysis and interpretation.

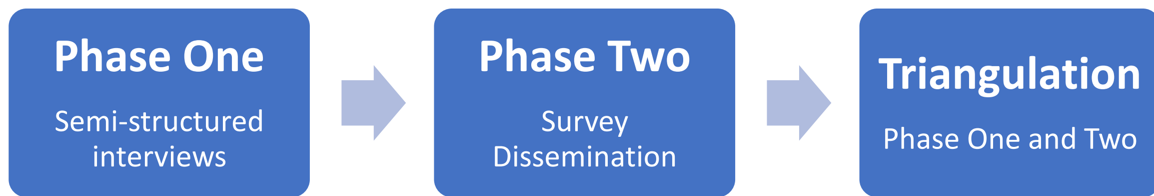

Figure 1. Project two-phase design.

2.3. Ethics and Consent

This project was approved through Northumbria University's Ethical Approval System. Before taking part, participants were given study information and asked to sign a consent form.

3. Phase One

3.1. Participants

Fifteen LGBT+ veterans were recruited, from across the UK, using purposive sampling to reflect a heterogeneous sample of LGBT+ veterans and serving personnel (a representative sample – details will be provided in full report). All participants enlisted before 12th January 2000 (the lifting of the ban), self-identified as being LGBT+ and as having been affected by the ban. All three services branches of the UK Armed Forces were represented. Peer-led participant recruitment was undertaken by the peer researchers at FWP.

3.2. Semi-Structured Interviews

Peer-researchers from FWP carried out telephone interviews using a semi-structured interview schedule. The interviews lasted around 90 minutes and were recorded using a digital recorder and then transcribed and uploaded to NVivo 12 server for analysis. All identifiable data was removed from the data at the point of transcription.

3.3. Findings

Transcripts from Phase One were analysed using Thematic Analysis following the six steps of Braun and Clarke (2006)[4]: familiarisation with the data, generation of initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining, and naming themes and producing the report. Following Thematic Analysis of the data, researchers identified seven overarching themes with sub-themes (see Table 1). Each are discussed with supporting quotes from the transcripts.

[4] Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative research in psychology*, 3(2), 77-101.

Table 1. Overarching themes and sub-themes

Overarching Themes	Sub-Themes
LGBT+ Identity Struggle	Pre-enlistment environmental influences and societal prejudice Identity challenges during service
Camouflage	Service before self: living a double life Chaff and flares: decoy behaviour
Intense Investigative Process	Privacy and intrusion Fear and scare tactics
Extraction, Exclusion, and Loss	Social isolation Feelings of loss Impact on emotional health and well-being
Access to Support	No transitional support Family and friends' support Poor treatment and a reluctance to access support
Long-Term Impact of Serving During the Ban	Perception of self Finding a sense of connection and acceptance Criminal records
Making Amends	More complicated than an apology Finances - pensions

3.3.1. LGBT+ Identity Struggle

The first theme noted through the analysis focussed on participants' 'identity struggle'. This primarily considered the external impacts on their identity pre-enlistment with reflections on challenges in service.

3.3.1.1. Pre-enlistment environmental influences and societal prejudice

It was evident throughout the transcripts that there were several pre-enlistment experiences that impacted participants' struggle with their sexuality and/or gender identity. From childhood through adolescence to early adulthood, this sub-theme encompasses environmental influences, societal prejudice, familial reactions, and early strategies to 'fit in'.

Some participants began questioning their identity during a time where wider society was not inclusive nor positive towards LGBT+ people and during the height of the aids pandemic HIV/AIDS epidemic. Societal prejudice experienced and witnessed contributed to participants early difficulties in reconciling their identity:

"We had everyone that was completely against people being gay" (p122)

"I mean I didn't even have the words LGBT then you know it was just that you were gay or queer or homosexual" (p880)

"It really wasn't fashionable to be gay, if anything, you would have been singled out and harassed and all the rest of it" (p411)

Further difficulties were expressed around language that was often a tool for ridicule and discrimination toward the LGBT+ community.

"It just wasn't a word that was used as a… no one wanted to talk about it as a nice thing, you know, you were a bum bandit, or you know" (p122)

During this time before joining the military, several participants referenced their family's reaction to the LGBT+ community and their struggle with their identity. Family responses during this time were mixed for participants, positive, negative, or dismissive. Some participants also experienced a split within their family (see also Family and friends' support)

"He said to me, it's a disease and it can be cured and those were his exact words" (p336)

"I *did again try and tell my mum on various occasions and again each time it was a phase I was going through" (p122)*

"Mum struggled with it more than dad did, which was difficult for me, because mum and I had been really close" (p880)

Often due to a lack of support and prejudice, participants felt they had to hide their true self from others. Participants often felt the pressure to conform to societal and familial expectations. This change in outward identity was a direct result of environmental influences.

"Now I have to start hiding myself" (p288)

"I just wanted to be the same as everybody else, I didn't want to be gay" (p411)

"It was trying to fit in to societal… and my family's, expectations and also because I knew it's easier, it's easier, if you're not gay" (p880)

3.3.1.2. Identity challenges during service

From transcripts it was clear that, during enlistment, the ban was not discussed during the recruitment process. Many participants were in fact unaware of the ban before they joined the military, this quickly became clear later in their service.

"I got in touch with the Careers Information Office, went and did my aptitude test and it was never really spoke about the fact of it being illegal to be gay, you know people just sort of, it wasn't spoke about" (p122)

Serving in the military under the ban was described as a hostile work environment where participants were exposed to a range of discriminatory behaviours, with derogatory attitudes and behaviours, and living under the threat of investigations.

"There were some who clearly had a bug up their arse about me being gay… they were a couple of others who were, let's say stiff… Others were complete arseholes" (p002)

"It just made my life uncomfortable here on the station with the investigations, the police work, the odd word, the sort of threat to violence from other people" (p288)

When continuously faced with this discrimination, participants increasingly chose secrecy of their LGBT+ identity, behaviour, and relationships to avoid notice. There was anger regarding an increasing incongruence between views of sexuality and their ability to do their job.

> *"There was this increasing anger that why should my life be so offensive and so incongruous with being able to be an army nurse, it didn't make sense" (p880)*

This led to questions as to why their LGBT+ identity should be considered to impact their work. Participants felt they had no choice but to hide this part of themselves from their colleagues and the military more broadly in order to protect their career. Furthermore, there were a number of negative reactions from senior members of the military when they discovered participants' LGBT+ identity.

> *"I just said to him, I'm gay and he just went… He just hit the roof… there's no fucking room for you poofters in this man's army" (p411)*

> *"I went and saw the Brigadier and that was awful. She told me I was an utter disgrace to the corps, and I'd let the corps down and she hated me" (p880)*

These experiences caused feelings of isolation due to participants' need to conceal their sexual and/or gender identity to protect their safety and career (see also Camouflage and Extraction, Exclusion and Loss). When one participant became aware of their sexual orientation whilst serving in the military, they reacted negatively, knowing the discrimination and behaviours many others had faced:

> *"I'd not sort of defined myself in that sort of way until that. Then sort of began to think about it and obviously panic about it" (p288)*

Rather than this realisation being a moment of clarity, it was shrouded in negativity, worry and secrecy.

3.3.2. Camouflage

The heading of theme 2 engages with a military metaphor; camouflage techniques help military personnel to blend into the surrounding landscape by using patterns that break up the background and foreground, so they become blurred. In the context of this current study, we understand cultural camouflage as a description of identity management strategies that allowed participants to conceal stigma while protecting their cultural membership and identity investments (Rome et al, 2021)[5].

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[5] Rome, A. S., Tillotson, J. S., & Maurice, F. (2021). Cultural camouflage: how consumers perform concealment practices and blending techniques to insulate cultural membership. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 1-28.

3.3.2.1. Service before self: living a double life

Military values that are held to be important virtues, arguably more important than values in civilian society, include obedience, loyalty, and courage. These are recognised characteristics of Armed Forces concept of 'service before self' and symbolise the change from self-identity to military identity and culture (Buckman et al, 2013)[6]. Participants' military service was central to their identity and therefore, their sexuality (at least at first) came second to their job roles and careers. For those that were already aware of their sexual orientation, they began to hide this aspect of themselves.

> *"You're having to do and think and achieve all of the time and I think your sexuality falls away from you at that point, you know, you are too busy focused on what you need to do to get through to pass out" (p411)*

> *"I was now in the job, so I'm going to lose the job if I don't hide everything" (p288)*

Participants reported living a double life throughout their military service, behaving differently when in uniform and when not. This led to a lot of secrecy, hiding their sexuality from their colleagues and friends, not being able to be completely themselves.

> *"I was having to live a double life, sometimes triple life. What I mean by that is that when I was in the (name of service) trying to be someone I am not because society said this is what you are supposed to be but then coming back to (anon) and then living a completely different life again … it was literally living sort of on a knife edge" (p122)*

> *"This hidden culture that you just… it was like you were living this double life and that, you had to be careful who you told and just keep things under cover really" (p499)*

> *"Fabrication in the gay community and then fabrication in your work" (p411)*

Living a double life meant that participants were unable to live their lives fully in the military or when they were in civilian society. This created barriers to connecting to others and being honest, potentially affecting the development and maintenance of friendships and relationships.

> *"We certainly wouldn't be holding hands or showing any affection towards each other. You just learned to adapt, and you learn to keep secrets. You learn to have a special language" (p299)*

> *"I was always worried about when I met other gay people. I never used to tell people I was in the military because I was always worried about being shopped" (p411)*

Maintaining this level of secrecy placed a significant demand on participants, creating further stress and anxiety. Consequently, negative feelings began to arise regarding their military

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[6] Buckman, J. E., Forbes, H. J., Clayton, T., Jones, M., Jones, N., Greenberg, N., ... & Fear, N. T. (2013). Early Service leavers: a study of the factors associated with premature separation from the UK Armed Forces and the mental health of those that leave early. *The European Journal of Public Health*, 23(3), 410-415.

service, with several participants explaining how this led to questions and thoughts of leaving military service, contradicting their service before self ethos.

"As far as being gay in the military, it was always about having to keep the balls in the air without being found out" (p336)

"What was so difficult about it I think was, after a fantastic weekend and the thought of having to go and do that again on a Monday morning and just not be me anymore" (p411)

This camouflage afforded participants a degree of perceived protection and safety. However, for some this led to potentially dangerous behaviour, putting themselves in compromising situations where no one else knew where they were or who they were with. Some participants reflected on this highlighting the safety concerns they did not consider at the time.

"I have to be really careful that I didn't tell whoever I was sleeping with that I was in the (service) … something could have happened … it makes you realise how dangerous it was … you put yourself in a situation where I would end up going to these people's houses or people's flats in the back of beyond, no one knew who you were, no one knew who they were" (p122)

Not everyone saw this secrecy in a completely negative way. It was suggested that the environment in female branches of the military (i.e., Women's Royal Naval Service, Women's Royal Army Corps and Women's Royal Air Force - which were integrated into the wider services in 1990s) appeared to be more relaxed regarding homosexual relationships. Here it was known that these relationships existed, but they were not discussed and there were no public displays of affection etc. One participant likened their experience hiding their sexuality and relationships as being part of a secret society:

"We had to hide our relationship, because everybody else did and so we became a member of a secret society. Yes, you were living a lie, but there is something about the secrecy of it, the fun of it, being creative about when you could find a way of sleeping with your partner, or being able to dance with your partner, or being able to hold her hand, or kiss her, or something like that, you know, the excitement" (p299)

3.3.2.2. Chaff[7] and flares[8]: decoy behaviour

Living a double life also led to many exhibiting decoy behaviours. This sub-theme focused on participants descriptions of adjusting outward behaviours and maintaining heterosexual relationships to divert attention away from their LGBT+ identity. The actions and behaviour of

[7] Chaff is composed of tiny aluminium/zinc coated fibres stored on-board the aircraft in tubes. When an aircraft is threatened by radar tracking missiles, chaff is ejected into the turbulent wake of the air behind the plane to break the radar lock on the missile.

[8] Flares are used to ignite in the wake behind the aircraft. These flares burn at temperature of above 2,000 degrees Fahrenheit, hotter than the jet engine nozzles or exhaust and exhibit large amounts of infrared light to act as a decoy to approaching missiles.

the participants was influenced by ‘coping techniques’ adopted to cover up for the perceived/enforced ‘inadequacies’ brought about by the ban.

Military personnel’s navigation of non-heterosexual identities was complex and highlights the, sometimes elaborate, concealment of stigmatised LGBT+ identity by over-compensating or deflecting. During interactions with others, some changed their behaviour to avoid people getting close to them.

> *“Styling it in this way where you’re kind of, not aggressive, but you become unapproachable, so you throw up boundaries, you’ve got that attraction, inside me I had that attraction, but I was trying to throw everyone off the scent… you don’t want people to get too close” (p411)*

> *“To keep myself safe I would say if someone, like say a guy was attracted to me and sort of made moves, I would say to myself, I’m gay, no, go away and then sometimes, if a woman did and I was really… I would think, no, I’m straight and go away sort of thing” (p499)*

A number of participants reflected on their decision to maintain heterosexual relationships as a decoy and to shut down any question of their sexuality. This varied from being seen to date those of the opposite sex to following through to marriage. For some this was an attempt to avoid their own questions around their sexuality but what was prominent throughout transcripts was the desire to feel safe and deflect.

> *“We decided to get married so that nobody could even ever question us ever again – we got married in a registry office... You know it was a funny thing to do but we felt safe” (p864)*

> *“I was always going out with men, going on dates with men, trying to be… not so much trying to be straight but trying to be not gay” (p880)*

Even when socialising outside of the military, participants were keen to ensure that they protected their identity for fear of being caught and investigated.

> *“We would go somewhere and there would be a women’s disco and you had to sign in. So, you would sign in with a different name because you would think the SIB would be there… there was always that sort of hidden thing that you had to do to avoid being caught” (p499)*

When questioned during investigations or as a result of rumours, participants would lie, diverting attention away from themselves. There was a great importance placed on the need to hide. For example, when questioned about being seen at a certain location associated with LGBT+ community, participants re-directed the questioning to focus on having gay friends

> *“You were always lying, always on the edge I suppose” (p299)*

> *“I did go to the local scene here and everything else and the police investigated me, but unless they actually caught you in bed there was no sort of… I had that thing saying, well, I’m allowed gay friends, aren’t I? Well, they can’t get me for that” (p288)*

This constant need to hide a large part of their life and identity, often put further strain on participants (see also Extraction, Exclusion and Loss). The need to continue to hide their sexual orientation and gender identity was reinforced through witnessing colleagues being charged and losing their careers.

"A friend of mine came out as, well probably didn't even have a word for it, as transexual. She went to tell the Officer in Charge that she thought she was in the wrong gender – end of career" (p299)

3.3.3. Intense Investigative Process

The military investigations into participants' sexuality were found to be intense. Many recalled intrusive questioning and breaches of privacy. During this time, there was heightened fear of what might happen to them, how they were treated, the consequences and backlash from these investigations. A number of participants also noted how the investigation experience impacted their mental health.

3.3.3.1. Privacy and intrusion

Throughout their service under the ban, participants experienced varying levels of breaches in privacy and intrusion into their personal lives. The investigative process was found to be intense and intrusive with participants reported violations of their privacy.

"They wanted their pound of flesh. I mean when they searched my room they went through papers and everything and I… luckily, I never had anything that anybody ever sent me anyway" (p864)

"It was a complete violation of everything and that, you know, to watch your world been got through was… that's kind of a fairly inexplicable feeling as well" (p336)

"They took me, marched me down to my room, in full view, again of everyone and I had to stand in my room while they totally went through everything" (p499)

The questioning process during investigations was also found to be extensive. One participant in particular reflected on the length of time they were questioned and the emotional strain of this:

"I was taken into a room and these same two SIB women were there and they interrogated me for 6 hours without a break… I was just totally overwhelmed after 6 hours. I didn't have a break, wasn't offered any refreshments or toilet or anything. I was just broken down really" (p499)

Additionally, the questions participants were asked by the investigators were very intrusive, prying into their personal life.

"The questions that I was asked was just horrendous, they were absolutely horrendous" (p336)

"One was quite horrible, sort of shouting questions… They showed my photos, so they showed a photo of like seeing me sat on the bed with about 4 other women

with our cuddly toys and just said, why are you sat on the bed? What were you doing? Were you having an orgy? What do you do when you have sex with a woman? Do you use clitoral stimulation? Do you use sex toys?" (p499)

Those that carried out the investigations often focussed their time staking out places and locations where they suspected the LGBT+ community socialised in the hope of identifying serving personnel. Furthermore, one participant reported being questioned by the officer in charge as to where these locations were.

"They had people stationed outside the pub here investigating me. They had; they had the local civilian police here" (p288)

"My Officer in Charge kept grilling me. She wanted to know where we went for entertainment. What we did with our time. She was always hoping that I would confess and give up the ghost of everybody that I knew. Give our secret places away" (p299)

This presented some difficult situations for participants leading to isolation and a need to conceal their actions and behaviours with further consequences on emotional health.

"You had to be really clever and on the edge of always being prepared to explain yourself in some way" (p299)

"If I talked to anyone about it. God I'm going to lose my job" (p288)

Participants reported being sent to see a psychiatrist after admitting their sexuality – this was before they were discharged from the military and during the investigation. Questions from the psychiatrists were also very intrusive and one participant reported being sent for a medical check as well.

"I admitted I was a lesbian, but they sent me to see a psychiatrist. I still remember the psychiatrist. I don't remember anything else except he asked me if I masturbated. I am still trying to figure that out… I did lie, of course. But apparently that was how he assessed I was a lesbian" (p299)

"Various further interviews, various obscene, offensive questions. Sent to a psychiatrist to see if I was nuts. See if I was trying to just say that I was even though I wasn't. Sent for a medical examination of my nether regions to see if that would confirm it" (p002)

3.3.3.2. Fear and scare tactics

Witnessing and experiencing the investigative process left participants fearing for themselves whilst serving in military under the ban. This fear often focussed on the anticipated consequence of an investigation into themselves.

"At the time it was black Ford Escort estates that the SIB, the Special Investigation Branch, the SIB used to drive round in…if you saw a black Ford Escort estate drive round the camp it just put the fear of God in you, you know, absolutely put the fear of God in you" (p336)

The actual experience of an investigation was unanimously negative. Participants were singled out and the behaviours of others often left them feeling fear and terror.

"The 6-month investigation I experienced. The… horror doesn't even come close" (p336)

"They wanted to punish me, that's how I felt, that they wanted their pound of flesh" (p864)

"It was horrendous, it was shocking, it was scary. It was terrifying. The actual experience was horrific... When it started off, I wasn't quite sure how it would end" (p880)

Many participants reflected on being made to feel uncomfortable, with several references to threats and acts of violence towards them by other military personnel.

"But it just made my life uncomfortable here on the station with the investigations, the police work, the odd word, the sort of threat to violence from other people" (p288)

"It's playtime for the RPs. They think they've won the lottery, don't they? They beasted me, unmerciful, they were just, they could not have been any worse. There was no physical violence, they didn't need to be able to punch you" (p411)

Intimidation was consistently reported by participants who experienced investigations. In addition to threats of violence, some participants also were told that their family and friends would be involved and interrogated in a search for incriminating evidence.

"There's the SIB... You know, them twats got involved for two days. Complete intimidation, you know, it was about, we are going to go and talk to every single person that you know. We are going to turn your family's home upside down. We want to find any piece of evidence" (p411)

"Threats to send me to the medical block to be strip searched because they said they thought I had love bites on my back and then they said, they knew about my twin, that she was gay and that if I didn't sign then, you know, it was likely that they would get her. They said they'd contact my widowed mum and just tell her what was going on" (p499)

3.3.4. Extraction[9], Exclusion and Loss

Upon being investigated and after dismissal, participants reported a sense of exclusion from their peers and a loss of identity, networks, and community. This also had an impact on participants mental health.

3.3.4.1. Social isolation

Participants experienced social isolation throughout their service due to feelings of exclusion. The camaraderie and sense of belonging found through military service was breached when

[9] Extraction refers to action of removing something, especially using effort or force.

rumours began around their identity and especially for those that were experiencing an investigation, with many reporting being treated like a criminal.

"There's nobody I can go to. Just nobody, completely isolated" (p002)

"I was vilified. I was treated like a criminal" (p864)

"I mean I was like a social leper" (p411)

The way in which participants were treated upon reports of their sexuality for some was very dismissive, reinforcing a severing of existing ties to the military. They were literally removed from the military base/station they were working on, separating them from their colleagues into isolation.

"It didn't matter that literally I've lost all of my friends… I was literally given 10 minutes, marched by RAF police to my room, given 3 big boxes and told to put everything in it and it would be shipped back to an address back in the UK or back here" (p122)

During this time, participants also felt isolated from any support. Despite previously good relationships with colleagues, they did not feel they could safely talk to any of them about what they were experiencing. Additionally, there was an uncertainty around returning home as some participants had not disclosed any of this to their family and friends.

"There were only a few people that I felt really close to in there, but I would never disclose anything, never ever disclose anything to them. As close as I was, you know, I just didn't feel confident enough to be able to have that conversation" (p411)

"I hadn't declared it to them, and you know, I couldn't say anything. I couldn't go back home" (p299)

"Feeling all too often that there was nobody I could go to. Nobody who would understand it. Nobody who would get where I was coming from." (p864)

3.3.4.2. Feelings of loss

Feelings of loss were prominent in transcripts, especially those that experienced an immediate dismissal. There was a loss of career, camaraderie, friendships, stability, and support networks. When investigations, rumours and suspicion began, this appeared to have a significant effect on participants' military careers, with some highlighting issues with receiving promotions at work. Once they were dismissed the successful and promising military careers many participants had were lost.

"It took away my career, it took away my pension, it took away my future. It just, it just utterly destroyed it and it took away a job I know I was good at… it just took away my home, my livelihood, my future, career, pension. It doesn't really get much worse than that, does it?" (p336)

"He's right for promotion, but my unit said, we're not going to promote him" (p002)

Specifically, participants reflected on the dismissive wording on their discharge papers from the military. For some the only explanation for discharge being ‘service is terminated’ or ‘services no longer required’.

“I think it was a letter and I received a message to say, your service is terminated” (864)

“They had put on my discharge papers, services no longer required which if you have not been in the armed forces, you would just assume that you were made redundant or whatever, but under article this, that and the other” (p299)

“You’ve got your red book and it says, services no longer required” (p499)

This leaf many participants feeling as though they had nothing to show for their time in service:

“Getting absolutely nothing out of it apart from a piece of paper that says you’re worthless” (p122)

“I was in a right state. It’s like I was in shock, it was the biggest shock of my life. I had never had anything like that ever happen to me in my life before… I was 27, 27 years of age and like my world fell apart. What do I do? You know, who do I tell? What can I do?” (p299)

Prominent throughout all transcripts was a feeling of a loss of everything. The stark contrast between life in the military and life post discharge was a ‘shock to the system’

“I had done really well in my career, and I had all the best accolades, and I was due to get what we call our buttons, shortly after and there I was going off to a grotty little bedsit with no pension, no money… I had a few civilian clothes and a few personal possessions, but really nothing much at all and I wasn’t out to my parents” (p299)

“I plummeted to depths that I didn’t believe were possible. Obviously, I’d lost my career, I’d lost my friends. I’d lost my livelihood, and this is a funny thing to say, but you’re kind of, you’re almost somebody when you’re in the military and you’re not, out here, you’re just nobody. You know, you’re Joe Soap out here” (p411)

“I mean I was a really, what I consider a very, eventually, I was pretty confident and happy and outgoing and then just when I left it was like, I don’t know, I was just left with this shell of a person and I’ve stayed with it… it’s like I’m not the me I’m meant to be, if that makes sense” (p499)

One participant reflected on being stripped of everything when they were placed in prison:

“I got the Court Martial, put in prison, they take everything off you, your uniform and everything” (p288)

Many participants did not want to leave the military. Regardless of how they had been treated throughout the investigative process, they had signed up to do a job they loved, and they did not want to lose this. One participant in particular reflected on the lengths they were prepared to go to in their desperation to delay the final verdict on their investigation and stay in the Army:

"I thought, that if I could fail my medical then it would give time for this solicitor to go through, you know, explore things. So, I came up with the idea that if I could break my wrist, you know, I wouldn't be medically fit to be discharged… It just shows you the desperation. I just didn't want to leave. I loved the army" (p499)

3.3.4.3. Impact on emotional health and well-being

Serving under the ban and experiencing exclusion and loss from the military community had a significant impact on participants mental health. They were deeply affected by the fallout from rumours and investigations

"I have had times when I've had break downs… I get dark moments in my life" (p864)

"I got through that process and was discharged and that destroyed me" (p411)

"Feeling a lack of worth, feeling unworthy… for a long time and it still affects me to an extent, that feeling of self-worth" (p002)

A number of participants reported experiencing suicide ideation as a result of their time serving under the ban and the intense investigations. The discharge from the military itself was another trigger for some participants. Not just the experience of serving and being discharged under the ban, but the swift transition from military to civilian life. The lasting effect on participants' emotional health was often exacerbated further by difficulties in finding employment post discharge.

"It was deeply painful, and the actual investigation is the only time in my life that I very seriously, well I was about to kill myself because I just felt I had nothing left" (p880)

"I suffered some big mental health issues when I left and you know, deep dark depressions and almost suicidal at points. Low mood, constant low mood. Not being able to fit in and constantly moving from job, to job, to job, to job, to job, because I just, I just couldn't hold it down. I found it really, really difficult, there's the structure and I think that's the other thing about what's unique to military people… The structure of the military really helps you to operate" (p411)

Unhealthy coping mechanisms were referenced through transcripts with several participants noting compartmentalising their experiences, thought and feelings.

"Learn to live with it. Put it away in a little box somewhere… I can tell you that is not a very healthy coping strategy" (p288)

"I've been able to put it in a box. I can lock that door on that box, and I can throw away the key" (p864)

"Keeping this secret, obviously I took to drinking, but there was a heavy drinking culture anyway" (p299)

There was an acknowledgement that no one discussed their mental and emotional health, it was not something that people did and that this could have a lasting impact. The attitude towards emotional health and well-being focussed on 'just getting on with it'.

“I mean no one to talk about these emotions, being told by everyone on earth that you’re a bad person for having these emotions and you know, what do you do? People internalise things and things break out, you know, it’s just… eventually that will explode” (p288)

“There was no such thing as mental health, well-being then. You know, this is all a recent phenomenon, it really is. It was compartmentalisation.” (p336)

“You just lived with that sort of discrimination, you just got on with it, you know, played the game” (p299)

There was a consensus in transcripts of experiencing loneliness and this endured through military service into life post discharge.

“At that point I just felt completely alone. I didn’t know anyone else who’d been through this” (p880)

“I do remember feeling incredibly lonely at times, but I didn’t see that as being particularly unusual and we kind of, I think we never even discussed it either, you know, my generation just got on with it really. You know we weren’t supposed to talk about loneliness or anything like that” (p299)

This lasting effect of exclusion and loss on the emotional health and well-being was discussed by participants. Many reflected on the difficulties they still felt in discussing their experience of serving in the military under the ban, with several participants reporting mental health diagnoses and being prescribed anti-depressant medication.

“Even now, when I talk about it, I get this big well up of emotions and this anger inside” (p288)

“Most people associate PTSD and the military with bombs, bullets, and everything else that goes with it, because of what happened to me I have a diagnosis of PTSD” (p411)

“After I had been out of the services, yeah, I went to psychotherapy. I just picked somebody out of the yellow pages… I was on anti-depressants for a while, just to get me through” (p299)

3.3.5. Access to Support

After leaving the military, participants reported a lack of support to transition out of the military. The experience of support from friends and family was mixed, but where they had a good support network, participants relied on this to get them through the transition. However, there was a reluctance to access support due to how they perceived they would be treated, not feeling as though they qualified for support and for some due to previous negative experiences in accessing support.

3.3.5.1. No transitional support

Upon discharge from the military, no support was given to participants to aid their transition back into civilian life from either the military or veteran organisation.

"I was given no support. And I just had to find your own feet…There's no, you know sort of like debriefing, you're sort of supposed to get on with it, you know they had no responsibility to me, I'm just there and get on with it" (p288)

"Not only no financial package, but no other sort of guidance" (p002)

There was a real need for some for transitional support that was not provided. The immediate loss of structures in the military was felt keenly by some participants, making transition more challenging.

"The structure of the military really helps you to operate. Once that's taken away and you're trying to cope out here without that structure, it's just incredible, it's so difficult to do" (p411)

"I signed up at 15 ¾. I'd become, even just within those 6 years, institutionalised" (p002)

There was an acknowledgement that under almost any other circumstance they would have received some form of support from the military upon discharge as part of a resettlement package. This left participants feeling unequal to other veterans.

"The thing is, I think if I'd have given, if I'd done my 18 months' notice or if I was coming out, you get your 18 months, with that you also get your resettlement" (p122)

"Other people, who had done, you know, served however many years would have some resettlement, you know, guidance as to what to do, how to do it, what things are out there and whatever. Whereas because I was thrown out and thrown out for that reason, there was nothing" (p002)

"If everything had been equal and I had finished my time, I would have been given a rehabilitation settlement. I would have been given some extra money for some training for civilian life" (p299)

Even though no support was available, it was clear that many would have been reticent to accept any support from the military to transition due to the way they had been treated under the ban.

"I've never got any help from the army. I didn't want it, because of the way they treated me, I didn't want any more people looking at me, you know, and giving me that shame again" (p002)

3.3.5.2. Family and friends' support

Participants reported mixed support from family regarding their LGBT+ identity, with some participants finding family supportive and others were met with very negative responses.

"He said to me, it's a disease and it can be cured and those were his exact words and at that I just stood up, picked up my coat, picked up my bag and I just said, send me half the bill and I just walked out… I just feel that he's, you know, my father's son. It was all very, not great, you know, pretty homophobic" (p336)

Those that had a good support network outside of the military were able to lean on their friends, family, or significant others to get over the shock.

"They were very supportive these new friends, you know, but not just friends, you know, my family were as well and even my poor mum, who couldn't understand lesbianism" (p880)

"My girlfriend, who would come round to my bedsit and things like that and help me to survive that initial shock, making the transition in to civilian life, because I wasn't equipped for civilian life. I realised how institutionalised that service made you at the time, because you had your own language, your own way of being" (p299)

A few participants did discuss some support from colleagues following discharge that they had served with. This was not a common finding.

"I kept in touch with a lot of the Wrens for a long time… I kept that liaison and it kept secret and so on and that was the joy of being a lesbian really and being part of this secret society, that were supportive of each other mostly and helped each other out" (p299)

"Everybody was just like, oh my God, that is so ridiculous, you know, who cares, you're a great Sister, you're a lovely person to work with, why would we care, and I got flowers, I got cards. They were horrified and shocked and I had so much support" (p880)

levels of isolation and exclusion were exacerbated for those that did not feel they could turn to their family and friends for support, leaving many lonely (see also Impact on emotional health and well-being). Some reasons for this lack of support stemmed from family beliefs, dynamics, and history.

"I can't talk to my family, because there's like, they're catholic and they wouldn't, you know" *(p288)*

3.3.5.3. Poor treatment and a reluctance to access support

Regarding accessing and receiving support, many participants reported a reluctance. This was due to how they perceived they would be treated, particularly by veteran-specific organisations through witnessing others and a general sense of the sector view on sexuality and gender.

"I've never sought any help from any veterans' groups, any army support groups, because I thought, as soon as I go there, they're just going to point the finger… judge me and make me feel guilty for being who I am and what I am" (p864)

"I knew that I couldn't go to any of the veteran's charities, that was quite apparent because the attitude at the time was, (a) you've been thrown out, (b) you were a faggot" (p002)

They were also some major concerns as to how they would be treated by the veteran organisations and a worry as to how this would impact them long-term.

"How would I be received, and I don't know and as there's pretty much zero confidence at the best of times. No, I am not sure I want to put myself through that" (p336)

"Taking drugs is more acceptable than being gay, you know. It's almost like it's more acceptable to get kicked out for taking drugs then it is for being gay" (p411)

Others did not seek out any support, particularly form veteran organisations, as they did not feel as though they qualified due to the nature of their dismissal.

"I didn't identify myself as a veteran and I thought, well I got kicked out, so I don't qualify for anything. It's only just with, like Fighting with Pride that I can actually start to maybe look at other things" (p499)

Compared to how participants perceived they would be treated by support services, a number of participants reported previous negative experience of accessing support. This created a barrier to accessing support in the future.

"I did go to my GP and said, I think I do want some… they called it psychosexual counselling at the time. She just looked, this woman looked at me and said, oh I think you've already made up your mind. She said, well look at how you're dressed. She had taken a look at me and the way I was appearing and because I wasn't all girly and made up with loads of jewellery and you know, nails and all the rest of it, painted long nails. She's made a value judgement at me by looking at how I dressed" (p864)

"Those people that are veterans, lots of them still have that homophobic mindset. You know, when you come into an Armed Forces Breakfast Club as a gay veteran, you're still having to deal with that. They call it banter" (p411)

3.3.6. Long-Term Impact of Serving During the Ban

The long-term impact of serving during the ban is vast. Participants reflected a lot on their perception of self as a result of their experiences and how this continues to affect them post discharge. It was important for participants to find a sense of connection and belonging after being ostracised because of their LGBT+ identity – for many they have begun to find this. A number of participants also experienced time in prison, the long-term impact of lasting criminal records is also considered.

3.3.6.1. Perception of self

Self-perception is an image we hold about our self and traits (self-concept) and how we see these (self-esteem). Our perception of self influences how we choose to present ourselves to those around us. Experiences of discrimination both before enlisting and challenges during military service affected the way in which participants continued to live their lives. Specifically, this was evident in the way they continued to outwardly identify themselves to a certain extent, but also the enduring impact of what others have said about them.

"Even now at my age, I still don't go around, because it was so ingrained in you that you just do not speak about being gay" (p336)

"I think the impact of it is almost like a shock to the system, you're told, you know nobody, like you'll never get a job, you're you know, a pariah and you just believe it" (p864)

"I became really resentful at being gay. Again, I reverted back to that person who almost didn't want to be gay" (p411)

Participants also described how being discharged from the military due to their sexuality affected their experience getting a civilian job and starting a new career. Their right to keep their sexual identity private was wavered when prospective employers required a reason for why they left the military.

"It's just my right to a private life has been taken away from me still" (p288)

"You've got your red book and it says, services no longer required. So you hand that to a prospective employer, and they are going to say well why don't they want you? Why did you, you know, why were your services no longer required?" (p499)

In an attempt to gain back their privacy, some participants reported continuing to hide this part of themselves (see also Chaff and flares: decoy behaviour). Participants lied about the reasons for their discharge from the military and continued to hide their LGBT+ identity.

"The thing that I found really hard and again it was a cause of great shame for us, going for jobs. I could always feel myself sweating and face going but I can always remember myself sweating and thinking, shit what do I say? Eventually I learned how to lie. I'd say, oh done my 6 years and I decided I didn't want to stay in" (p864)

"I doctored my discharge papers, because that was the other thing, you know, I had had all good reports and I'd had excellent on my report and I'd had 97% or something like that, but when they discharged me, they reduced that to fair and 60%" (p299)

"There was many people I didn't tell really. I just kept it hidden, it was just inner shame that I carried internally for so many years" (p499)

As previously mentioned in 'Impact on emotional health and well-being', participants continued to compartmentalise their thoughts, emotions and experiences of their time serving in the military under the ban. A number of participants reflected on how this continues to affect them

"You may box it up, and put it somewhere, but it's still there, you know, no matter how, how successful your career's been, it's still there… Yes, it's very traumatic, yes, but it only has the impact on you as a person give to it, the only emotion, the power it only has is what you give it, going forward" (p288)

"You start living your lie at a very early age and it becomes a pattern, you just lie all the time. It doesn't feel like a lie, it seems more avoiding the truth and playing a game, to belong, to feel the peer pressure of whatever that is, whatever your difference is, you want to comply, you want to be with your peers, you want to be

like everybody else, so you adapt, and you keep on adapting nearly all your life" (p299)

There were lasting effects on the emotional health and well-being of the participants who have not yet fully processed their experience. Again compartmentalising, ignoring what happened whilst serving under the ban compromised their health.

"I was getting very depressed. I was sitting all day not being able to eat. I went down to about 8 stone. I eventually found a therapist and I realise, with hindsight, it is like that knock on effect. You know, I dealt with what I dealt with when I was 27, but by the time I was coming up to 40 and all those things happened, it just had that knock on effect" (p299)

"I've been in intensive care because of overdoses. Self-harm, my self-harm has got so severe that I've had skin grafts because I'd used caustic soda. So, and it's all because, I don't know, I've just sort of felt this inner shame and I just can't get rid of it" (p499)

When asked what they felt was the biggest impact of the ban on their life one participant said:

I think in one word, I would never, ever deny my sexual orientation again. (299)

3.3.6.2. Finding a sense of connection and acceptance

After leaving the miliary, participants wanted to find some acceptance around their LGBT+ identity having had to supress this. Leaving the military gave them an opportunity to do this.

You know, you spend such a long time adapting your personality in there that when you come out, you just look around and you think how do I fit in here? How? I am so different from these people. You know, I think differently. I act differently. (411)

There is a world, there's a life, there's a scene where I can actually explore who I really am spatially and really find out who I am. I knew deep down who I was. I knew deep down I was gay, of course I did, but there was always this, you know, trying to fight it. I really began to enjoy life (f880)

It was important to find a way to move forward to find a sense of connection and belonging. Participants acknowledged that this needed to come from themselves as much as the inclusivity of wider support networks.

"The only way, a positive way forward is to recognise one's mistakes, realise how you do them and then do a positive change, move forward" (p288)

"If you can't be who you are, you are not living, even if it is all your warts and spots and everything else, but you are not living" (p299)

However, there was a desire to access support or groups with others who have similar experiences. It was felt that connecting with the LGBT+ veteran community would give them a safe space to be back in a military environment, a sense of belonging.

"I mean I would like to, where I can meet other people that have maybe been kicked out. I think that's what *it is as well… I think it would be nice to be part of a group where there's other people there that know and you know, what I sort of*

went through. it would be nice to be around ex-military maybe and have that banter again" (p864)

"You felt so isolated for so long, just sort of like being in touch with other veterans that, not necessarily definitely had a similar experience, but although that does help greatly, but just to sort of get back into that sort of military family and have that camaraderie and not feel so isolated" (p499)

Participants that have already found and accessed this support reflected on the positive impact this has had on them.

"That accelerated everything, because it finally felt, I knew some gay people" (p411)

"Talking to other female veterans in Snowdonia and hearing their stories, it sort of really helped and we gelled so quickly, and we're sort of going to be lifelong friends and it's really helped my self-esteem and also helped my confidence" (p499)

Importantly, there was a clear need for wider awareness and a reflection on LGBT+ history in the military. Participants felt that just because you are part of LGBT+ community, this does not mean that you can relate to each other. Some found it difficult to relate to those who had served in the military after the ban as they did not have the same experiences and felt they could not comprehend what they went through.

"Don't get me wrong, they are, you know, they're great advocates for me. They're behind me all the time, you know, because I'm there and they've flown the flag, but they cannot relate to my story whatsoever. They just can't comprehend it. They can't understand it. They just skip over it, they're just kind of like, right, okay well this is how it is now" (p411)

3.3.6.3. Criminal records

As a result of many investigations into their sexuality whilst serving under the ban, a number of participants served prison time and to this day still have a criminal record. This is despite having had their dishonourable discharge amended to honourable since the lifting of the ban (to ensure anonymity, participant numbers are not reported here).

"I mean have an honourable discharge and yet still have a criminal record for it"

Often LGBT+ personnel were criminally charged with 'gross indecency' as a result of their sexuality coming to light – essentially labelling them as gay. However, this was not the case for all as some were brought up on charges for other criminal activity as a way to punish them. This creates more problems for LGBT+ veterans who have criminal records due to their sexuality or gender identity but were charged with a different crime. Once participants considered the difficulty in attempting to absolve criminal records related to the ban:

"Mine are quite clear cut, you know, it's gross indecency, so it's quite clear… about 200 and odd people who are quite clear it's actually about being gay. The biggest problem that we have is that we've got 2000 odd people on there who,

although, probably the investigation was begun but for whatever reason they've not been labelled as and they've something else as their criminal record"

These criminal records have had a lasting effect on the participants. Their ability to find employment post service was compromised with their right to withhold the sexuality from potential employers. This has also served to keep them isolated and feeling excluded from the wider community.

3.3.7. Making Amends

Despite recent apologies made to the LGBT+ veteran community, making amends is something that is strongly felt is still needed. 'Making amends' as actions that are taken to demonstrate a true understanding of the impact of the ban, participants feel that apologies are just words and that it is more complicated than that. Truly making amends is about acknowledging and aligning value to actions by holding up the wrong-doings and offering more than words or tokenistic gestures – it is listening and acting and acknowledging. This theme represents participants discussions of their views on this.

3.3.7.1. More complicated than an apology

It was very clear in the transcripts that making amends to the LGBT+ veteran community is more complication than an apology and that more needs to be done.

"I'm sick of apologies, I don't want apologies, I want proper recompense. I want proper action" (p880)

There were some complicated feelings towards existing apologies as to how this could possible rectify the wrong that had been done.

"So can anything help? No, I don't believe. No, how can a ruined life be righted?" (p336)

"The apology was great in 2020, 20 years late, you know. Oh, you can wear your medals, you know, no one really cares" (p122)

Additionally, one participant explained how it is not just a case of returning medals and allowing LGBT+ veterans to now wear them. For this participant, their beret was taken from them during the investigation under the ban and therefore despite being able to now wear one on parade, they do not have their beret that they wore during service.

"The amount of people that I spoke to who don't care about that because the fact that, you had them either ripped off you, you were told you couldn't wear them, when is the opportunity now… It's like even when I did the parade, yes, I was extremely proud to do the parade and extremely proud to be there, but I had so much sort of questions beforehand about the fact that you can't wear your beret because you've not got a beret" (p122)

3.3.7.2. Finances – pensions

Following on from apologies, the most prominent discussion participants had was around pensions and the potential financial loss their experience when they lost their job. Due to the nature of their dismissal, many participants are left with no pension from their time in the military.

> *"That's the big thing now. I'm short for my pension... Nothing can make a difference when I'm 60" (p288)*

> *"I want a pension. I want all the things that you know I didn't have the opportunity to get, through no fault of my own" (p880)*

Participants also called for compensation for what they went through serving under the ban, the treatment they received, the loss of their career, friends and support networks, the impact on their emotional health and well-being and for some lasting criminal records.

> *"It is a principal thing and I suppose it's about looking at people's pensions but then looking at some sort of compensation. I think they certainly do need to sort of look at recompense. They need to look at how that works" (p122)*

> *"Compensation for harassment would be a nice bonus" (p288)*

> *"I hope that we get compensation, I hope that we win the fight for recompense for how we were treated and so on, but if it doesn't happen in my lifetime, I am not bothered" (p299)*

> *I would like a little bit of compensation because of what happened when I left, that mental decline, that lack of stimulation. (411)*

4. Summary

Phase One highlighted pertinent experiences around pre-enlistment, serving during the ban including discrimination and harassment and camouflage of participants LGBT+ identity. The impact of the ban on mental and physical health, career and alienation cannot be underestimated. The voices of the participants highlighted the importance of listening to unique experiences in each narrative, which included previously unidentified and unexplored acts of quiet resistance.

It is hoped the post-repeal of the ban and the Independent Review will, collectively, support the findings of Phase One outlined in the report, by providing evidence of the need to support the development of a network of LGBT+ peer support groups and create a true sense of re-integration into the military family and veteran community.

5. Next Steps

5.1. Phase Two

Phase Two of this study is now in development. Building on the findings from Phase One, a survey is being developed to disseminate to a much wider pool of participants. Data collected from the semi-structured interviews will be used to inform the questions that will make up the survey to explore initial findings in further detail.

In order to do this, Phase Two will involve the distribution of an online survey to individuals who are known to FWP. The survey will be developed using the Jisc Online Surveys and will seek to ask a number of closed and open questions addressing the project research aim. Specifically, this survey will explore details of the impact of serving under the ban as well as access to support networks.

5.2. Final Report

A full and final report will be submitted on completion of both Phase One and Phase Two and will include recommendations based on analysis of both.

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